



Department of Justice

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Middle District of Florida

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MORE THAN 80 ARRESTED FOLLOWING LARGE-SCALE MARRIAGE FRAUD ROUND-UP DUBBED "KNOT SO FAST"

ORLANDO- More than eighty individuals involved in various marriage fraud conspiracies throughout Florida were arrested this week following a joint investigation between the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

The results of the operation dubbed "Knot so Fast" were announced here today at a joint news conference hosted by United States Attorney Robert E. O'Neill; Robert W. Weber, Special Agent in Charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Tampa, and Kathy Redman, District Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in Tampa.

ICE special agents made arrests in Orlando, Jacksonville, Tampa, Sarasota, Cocoa Beach and Ft. Myers. Those arrested included individuals who arranged the sham marriages; American citizens who accepted bribes, and foreign nationals who, in some cases paid up to \$10,000, to obtain a benefit by committing fraud.

The vast majority of those arrested face criminal charges; however, there are some that face administrative immigration charges to include possible deportation.

Some of these marriages were arranged by individuals who would "coach" those committing the fraud on how to make their marriage appear legitimate. They had wedding

dressess on hand, fake cakes, and preset staging for pictures.

U.S. Attorney O'Neill stated, "Sham marriages are a threat to Homeland Security. They subvert our immigration laws and our efforts to ensure proper and legal identification of those who enter and remain in our country. Those individuals who take illegal shortcuts to citizenship, or assist in that activity, will be investigated and prosecuted."

"Benefit fraud poses a significant vulnerability that must not go unchallenged," said SAC Weber. "Operation Knot so Fast should send the clear message that ICE and its law enforcement partners will not tolerate the exploitation of our country's immigration system. Whether you are marrying one person under false pretenses or various people, or facilitating the fraud, know this: you will be found, arrested and held accountable for your actions."

"Marriage fraud will not be tolerated. It is a direct attack to the national security of the United States," said Director Redman. "The process of detection of marriage fraud begins the moment an application is submitted to our agency and later when a couple comes to our offices for a marriage interview. So, beware. The job of our adjudicators is not just to grant or not an immigration benefit. It is also, and most definitely, keeping our country secure."

These investigations were part of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS's) Document and Benefit Fraud Task Forces (DBFTFs). The task forces were created in March 2006, to target, seize illicit proceeds of and dismantle the criminal organizations that threaten national security and public safety and address the vulnerabilities that currently exist in the immigration process. Through DBFTFs, ICE partners with other agencies such as the Department of Labor, the Social Security Administration, U.S. Postal Service, U.S.

Citizenship and Immigration Services, the Department of State and various state and local law enforcement agencies. These task forces focus their efforts on detecting, deterring and disrupting both benefit fraud and document fraud.

Over the past four years, the number of document and benefit fraud investigations launched by ICE has increased from 2,334 in Fiscal Year 2004 to 3,591 in FY 2005, to 5,222 for FY 2006 and first half of FY 2007. Corresponding criminal indictments in these cases have increased from 767 to 875 to 1,595, while arrests have risen from 1,300 to 1,391 to 2010 and convictions have increased from 559 to 992 to 1,609.

These cases were investigated by ICE and CIS. The following Assistant United States Attorneys are handling the prosecution of these cases: Tanya Davis Wilson, Daniel C. Irick, Carlos Perez, Dale Campion, Tysen Duva, Vincent Citro, Eduardo Toro-Font, Nicole M. Andrejko, Dan Irick, Bishop Ravenel, and Jesus Casas.

U.S. Attorney O'Neill thanked the following agencies for their assistance: ICE's Office of Detention and Removal; the U.S. Marshals Service; FBI; Daytona Beach Police; Volusia County Sheriffs's Office, Brevard County Sheriff's Office; Orange County Police; Osceola County Police; Seminole County Sheriff's Office; Lake County Sheriff's Office; Kissimmee Police; Department of State Diplomatic Security; Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS); Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (JSO) and the United States Secret Service (USSS).

An indictment or complaint is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until proven guilty.